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# The role of parental styles the socio-emotional competence of children at the beginning of school years

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## Abstract

The present study aims at investigating the relationship settled between the parental style practised by the parent and the modality of behavioural response of the child expressed at the level of social and emotional competences in different situations, as well as the implications of this type of relationship over the social and emotional development of the child at the beginning of school years. The pilot study represents a validation of the direction of research toward which we aim at, that is to approach the problematics of the practised parental style in relation to different behavioural types practised during childhood expressed at the level of social and emotional competences.

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**Keywords:** social competence; emotional competence; parental style; adaptation to the beginning of school years;

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## 1. Introduction

The latest researches from the Early Education domain are centered mainly on the prominence of the social and emotional factors as being criteria with a powerful impact in school adaptation at the beginning of formal schooling, as well as in the subsequent school success (Goleman, 2001; Zins et al., 2004; Ladd & Price, 1987).

It is necessary for the present study to complete a few conceptual determinations: synthetically, when we speak about emotional competence we have in view abilities like emotions understanding which implies an expressive component – the ability to label emotions and a receptive component- the ability to recognize emotions based on verbal labelling (Denham, 2006); emotional expression refers to the ability of transmitting affective messages according to the social context (the development of such ability is closely connected to the socialization of emotions Ștefan, 2008); the third component of emotional

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competence refers to emotional regulation- that is the monitoring, evaluation and modification of emotional reactions with the aim of manifesting socially desirable behaviours. On the other hand, children's social competence refers to the manifestation of socially desirable behaviours like the prosocial behaviours of assistance, altruistic and friendship forming, etc. The foundation of these behaviours develops within the family.

Family education represents an essential modality to achieve education and manifests the following characteristics: is realized unsistematically, through direct life experiences, manifests diffusively in the behaviour of groups and individuals, imbues the personality by its peculiarity or by its implicate, undiminished and continuous influence (Ionescu & Negreanu, 2006). The quality of family education shapes the development of the individual personality, the chances of school success and of his subsequent affirmation, from an early stage.

The educational parental style refers to the nature and characteristics of family relationships within which the educational process is achieved (Stanciulescu, 1997). The parental style practised by the parents as a form of educational manifestation represents a constellation of attitudes manifested towards the child which creates an emotional climate in which parental behaviours are expressed (Darling & Steinberg, 1993). Through the practised parental style, parents transmit information and values but also they contribute to the formation of a system of competences which manifest at the behavioural level. In the process of socializing children, parents with different parental styles contrast in a number of respects, including how they attempt to control children's behavior and elicit children's compliance, and how warm and responsive they are toward children. Thus, different parental styles manifest their role at the level of behavioural manifestations from the sphere of children's social and emotional competences (Hart, Ladd & Burleson, 1990, Baumrind, apud Stanciulescu, 1997).

The specialty literature conceptualizes parental styles around two dimensions: „demandingness” and „responsiveness” which are illustrated in the interaction between parents and children (Mangleburg, 1992). The dimension of responsiveness refers to the fact that parents who fall in this dimension manifest autonomy-granting, individuality encouraging behaviours and also supportive behaviours towards their children needs. The dimension demandingness include those parental practices which impose maturity, discipline, excessive control over children's behaviour and confrontation of the children who disobey. In defining parental styles our study focuses on the classification achieved by Diana Baumrind (Stanciulescu, 1997) which takes into consideration two variables parental control and parental support. Thus, we obtain four models of action: permissive, authoritarian, authoritative and indifferent. The authoritarian style associates a high level of control and restriction of the child's autonomy who is imposed strict principles and conduct rules: authority, tradition, work, order, discipline, values imposed sistematically by the parents. The authoritative style combines the systematic control to a high level of parental support. Parents formulate rules and control their observance but they do not impose them, they encourage verbal give and take, explaining the reasoning behind the applied rule, stimulating at the same time their autonomy in thinking (apud Stanciulescu, 1997). The permissive style is characterized by a low level of control, associated with the identification of the parent with the child's emotional states. Very few conduct norms and responsibilities are imposed to the child and the way he answers parental expectances is not subjected to the exercise of control. The uninvolved style is characterized by non-involvement and indifference.

## 2. Objectives

Starting from the results of the studies in the specialty literature the present pilot study aims at investigating the relation established between the parental style practised by the parent and the behavioural modality of response of the child, expressed at the level of the social and emotional

competences in different situations, as well as the implications that this type of relation might have over the social and emotional development of the child at the beginning of his schooling. To this effect, we propose to analyze the influence of the authoritarian, authoritative and permissive parental styles over the social and emotional competences.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Participants

The research has been performed on fixed, non-aleatory sample, the lot of subjects being made up of 106 children, of an average age  $m = 6,531$ ,  $SD = 0,27$ , 59 boys (55,65%) and 47 girls (44,35%), which come from school units of the Argeş district, both from the urban – 79 children (74,53%), and from the rural background – 27 children (25,47%).

#### 3.2. Instruments

a. With a view to evaluate the social competence we have used Social Skills Rating System (Gresham & Elliott, 1990), which represents an evaluation instrument for social behaviours, of screening and classification for social behavior problems. The applied form was that used for parents, being made up of 55 items which come under four competence areas: cooperation, assertion, responsibility and self-control. The instrument presents good internal consistency in the study (Chronbach  $\alpha = .75$  to  $.83$ ).

b. To evaluate emotional competences we have used different instruments according to the targeted competence. Thus, for emotions understanding we have used an instrument adapted after Denham Affective Knowledge Test (Ştefan, 2010). We have evaluated this type of competence by selecting five suggestive images of a female face which expressed undifferentiated emotions such as: joy, fury, sadness, fear, indifference, measuring also emotional expression, capacity of receiving emotions.

c. To evaluate the strategies of solving problems we have used a procedure adapted after Wally Problem Solving Test (Webster-Stratton, 1990). Children are presented five problem situations, having a potential conflict, each of them being accompanied by a suggestive image: rejecting a friend, assuming a mistake, unjust treatment from another child, the limitation of access to a toy, the disapproval of an adult. Their answers fall into two categories: positive and negative strategies.

d. Parental Authority Questionnaire- PAQ instrument realized by John R. Buri. The PAQ is a 30 item instrument designed to measure parental authority or disciplinary practice from the point of view of the child of any age. The PAQ has three subscales based on prototypes of parental authority, authoritarian and authoritative. The PAQ is scored easily by summing the individual items to comprise the subscale scores.

### 4. Results

The results confirm the fact that the parental style practiced by the parent influences the behavioural modality of response of the child at the social and emotional level. The unifactorial variant analysis ANOVA has been used to demonstrate the effect of the parental style (authoritarian, authoritative and permissive) over the components of the social and emotional competence, being used at the level of each factor of the social and emotional competence. The variance analysis has been significant for for the components of the social competence: assertion ( $F=11.34$ ,  $p=.00$ ), responsibility ( $F=10.51$ ,  $p=.00$ ) and self-control ( $F=35.87$ ,  $p=.00$ ), but not for cooperation ( $F=35.09$ ,  $p=.07$ ). As regards the components of

the emotional competence we obtain the following results: emotional regulation  $F=2.09$ ,  $p=.00$ , expression  $F=1.84$ ,  $p=.00$  and emotions understanding  $F=1.54$ ,  $p=.02$

Concerning the comparison between parental styles at the level of each dimension of the analyzed competences, we obtain significant differences between the authoritarian and the permissive style at the level of the dimension assertion ( $t=3.174$ ,  $p=.000$ ), cooperation ( $t=7.83$ ,  $p=.000$ ), self control ( $t=5.52$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and emotional regulation ( $t=1.47$ ,  $p=.000$ ); at the level of the comparison between the authoritarian and authoritative style we obtain significant differences at the level of the dimension cooperation ( $t=4.11$ ,  $p=.000$ ), self control ( $t=3.27$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and emotional regulation ( $t=1.12$ ,  $p=.000$ ). Significant differences between the permissive and the authoritative style can be found at the level of the dimension cooperation ( $t=3.71$ ,  $p=.000$ ), assertion ( $t=2.14$ ,  $p=.000$ ), responsibility ( $t=2.74$ ,  $p=.000$ ) and self control ( $t=2.25$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

## 5. Discussion

The results of the present study cannot be generalized, as it represents a pilot study for a more ample ongoing research. The study opened a validation for the direction of our researches, that is the approach of the problematics of the parental style practised in relation to the development of the social and emotional competences in the childhood.

At the level of the dimension *assertion* – the capacity to initiate behaviours, to present to the others and to answer others' actions is connected to the practice of an authoritative style. One of the forms of assertion can be seen in the manipulation and the exploring of the environment. The attempt to interact efficiently with the environment is reflected in the child's ability to reason upon a task like upon a puzzle piece until he completes it successfully. Similarly, children whose parents practise the permissive style have the affirmation tendency, but the tendency is disordered and inequable. The destructive forms of the assertive behaviour are illustrated by the child's intention to do evil around him, mostly to destroy other children belongings, the destructive form reflecting mainly in destroying all barriers which detain him from attaining his objectives. This type of behaviour is identified chiefly at children whose parents practise an authoritarian parental style. The mechanism is simple and for the most part predictable: in his attempt to explore the environment the child is surrounded by strict rules, he is unsupported and restricted.

At the level of the dimension *cooperation* there were no significant differences between the practised parental styles. Cooperation implies to help the others, the interaction in solving a common task, the distribution of materials, of tasks. To carry out a common objective (cooperation) implies a complex of actions that a child of 7 years cannot yet fulfill.

The dimension *responsibility* has been operationalized as being children's ability to communicate with the adults as well as the respect of property and others' work. The 1-st grader learns to be responsible and manifests this capacity as early as the first months: he respects the assigned tasks, (he does his homework, he prepares his schoolbag, communicate to his parents his needs for the school activity, etc.). The development of responsibility as a dimension of the social competence of the 1-st grader represent an accumulation of the family factors influence through the parents' role and is more developed at pupils whose parents practise an authoritarian style.

*Self control*, another component of the social competence is defined as the effort of self-control through the self (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Self-control is involved in thinking, emotions, in obtaining performance and in attention (Baumeister, Heatheron & Tice, 1993). A low self-control is associated with behaviour problems while a high level of self-control is an indicator of academic performance (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005), of stable and positive interpersonal relations. We observe a high level of self-control at children whose parents practise an authoritarian and authoritative style,

while at children whose parents practise a permissive style the control is low: the child speaks unrequested, do not develop the adequate school activities, walks in the classroom and he even leaves the learning space.

At the level of the emotional competence, *understanding emotions* and *emotional expression* represent components which are influenced by the parental style. Thus, an authoritarian parental style do not encourage the forming of such competences as compared to the permissive parental style, in which the child is free to express himself without constraints. *Emotional regulation* implies complex regulatory mechanisms: the regulation capacities are responsible for the monitoring of emotional positive or negative reaction and enable the diminishing of the stress induced by dysfunctional emotional states. The constrained, frozen style does not give the child the possibility to understand social situations and implicitly he cannot solve them in a sociably desirable manner. The permissive style, through freedom of action corroborated with the lack of reference points induces the same effects. A controlled parental style, based on comprehensible rules also for the child determines social behaviours accepted by him, as well as the adequate solving of the social encountered problems.

## 6. Conclusions

The practical implications offered by the present study refer to the conception and the validation of certain development programs of social and emotional competences during childhood for a better adaptation to different interpersonal situations on one hand, and on the other hand to the development of some efficiency programs of the parental styles practised by parents.

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